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SUBJECT: CROATIA PLANNING EUROPE'S FIRST MAJOR REVERSE
STING OPERATIONS

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Croatian police are planning to undertake US-style reverse sting operations in the coming months, becoming the first European country to do so. The operations are a direct result of recommendations from post's ICITAP program to Croatian police to help strengthen their fight against organized crime. ICITAP is now training Croatian police on tactics, with assurances from prosecutors that they will pursue criminals arrested through these types of operations. Croatian police will ask for additional assistance and resources from the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Croatia's newly revised law on Criminal Procedure, approved in December 2008, authorized reverse sting operations called "simulated sales" in Croatia. Croatia, to our knowledge, becomes the first country in Europe that can and will conduct reverse sting undercover operations. While many European countries conduct undercover operations in which police buy drugs, they are not authorized to sell drugs due to entrapment/agent provocateur concerns. Police officials tell poloff that advisors from EU member states frequently raise this issue when told that the Croatian police are preparing to conduct reverse stings.

¶3. (SBU) Poloff received assurances from Chief State Prosecutor Mladen Bajic and his two deputies over the course of several meetings this spring that prosecutors accept the new methodology and will prosecute cases resulting from reverse stings. Bajic and his deputies said they believed reverse stings will be an effective tool to help fight organized crime in Croatia and added that they want to proceed with the "American model." ICITAP is now conducting training to teach prosecutors how to effectively argue such cases in court and deal with agent provocateur allegations.

¶4. (SBU) ICITAP advisors will train police supervisors, handlers, and, for the first time, the actual undercover operatives beginning in the fall 2009. The Head of the Forensic Center's Drug Section and the Head of Narcotics Enforcement recently met with Jeff Palmer, ICITAP Croatia advisor, to ask about the best ways to package the drugs for operations. Mr. Palmer, who previously ran drug units for police in South Florida, has extensive experience with reverse sting operations. As Croatia progresses in its plans for its first operations, the Croatian police will reach out to DEA for assistance, especially with arranging the quantities of drugs they need to conduct a sting. Initial plans are to target foreign-based organized crime groups operating in Croatia, possibly Italian or Serbian drug syndicates.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: The new reverse sting authorization should not raise the cost to crime groups for operating in Croatia, but opens an opportunity for enhanced regional cooperation

and creates a model for neighboring countries. Police and prosecutors already tell us that they have been approached by authorities in Republika Srpska in Bosnia to mentor them on building their own capacity to conduct such operations. Police also hope to eventually work with Italian, Serbian, and other authorities in the region to target groups operating across the Balkans. END COMMENT.

BRADTKE